# New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1951

Volume XII, Number 24 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of November 19, 1951

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"Dinosaur Wharf"

"Paint Your Wagon"

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of November 19, 1951*

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NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK TIMES

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*Yearly Subscription $25.00*

*Published by* CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, Inc., 235 East 22nd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

# "Paint Your Wagon"

**Daily Mirror**

November 13, 1951

## Barton Shines in Bright Hit, 'Paint Your Wagon'

By ROBERT COLEMAN

After a lengthy tune-up tour out of town, "Paint Your Wagon" arrived here last evening at the Shubert Theatre in almost tip-top shape. It still needs some judicious cutting to bring it down to proper running time, but producer Cheryl Crawford and her associates are quite up to that job.

The Alan Jay Lerner-Frederick Loewe musical boasts a colorful book and a score that is easy on the ears. With the California gold rush as a background, it packs atmosphere, romance, comedy, lusty singing and fast-paced dancing into what we think you will find a most enjoyable show.

James Barton, a truly great performer, is at his terrific best as a pioneer who would rather found a town than stake a claim away from it. Jim displays his magical hoofing and his inimitable genius for clowning. He also proves that he can put heart into a song.

One of the funniest things you're likely to see this season or next is an episode in which Barton buys a Mormon's extra wife at auction, gets riotously pie-eyed and tries to carry her over the threshold of his cabin. He is hilariously assisted by Marijane Maricle in these super hi-jinks.

Olga San Juan, a youthful veteran of New York niteries and Hollywood films, is outstanding as Barton's wilful daughter. When she finds a lad to her fancy, nothing stops her from getting him. And she shows excellent taste in setting her cap for Tony Bavaar, who impersonates a Mexican of Castilian ancestry. Bavaar is the discovery of the season. He has rugged good looks and a wonderful voice.

By providing an over-abundance of entertainment, Miss Crawford has made it impossible for us to salute fittingly all those in the large cast who merit it. However, in the face of an onrushing deadline, we must tip our hat to Ralph Bunker, James Mitchell, Kay Medford, John Randolph, Josh Wheeler, Robert Penn, Mary Burr and Gemze de Lappe.

Other assets are expert direction by Daniel Mann, lively choreography by Agnes de Mille, sets and costumes by Oliver Smith and Motley, and Franz Allers' batoneering in the pit. Allers, former ballet maestro, is a tower of strength to singers and dancers.

All the record companies are certain to wax Loewe's score. RCA-Victor is bringing out an album, with the original cast, and the eminent Ezio Pinza is making a rival recording. The numbers you're likely to be hearing most are "I Still See Elisa" and "I Talk to the Trees."

"Paint Your Wagon" proved a solid click last night, but after it has been trimmed to size it will be even better. It's swell to have the one and only James Barton back with us in a hit, and it's heart-warming to welcome Olga San Juan and Tony Bavaar to Broadway stardom. The first-nighters blistered their palms applauding. We suspect this is going to be a musical that will have avid playgoers looking up acquaintances connected with it, for tickets are going to be hard to come by.

**"PAINT YOUR WAGON"**

Musical play with book and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner; music by Frederick Loewe; staged by Daniel Mann; settings by Oliver Smith; dances by Agnes de Mille; costumes by Motley; presented by Cheryl Crawford at the Shubert Theatre, November 12, 1951. The cast:

Walt.....Bert Matthews
Jennifer Rumson..Olga San Juan
Salem Trumbull..Ralph Bunker
Jasper.....Ted Thurston
Ben Rumson.....James Barton
Steve Bullnack.....Rufus Smith
Pete Billings....James Mitchell
Cherry.....Kay Medford
Jake Whippany.....Robert Penn
Mike-Mooney....John Randolph
Dr. Newcomb....David Thomas
Sing Yuy.....Tom Ai
Lee Zen.....Steven Cheng
Edgar Crocker..Richard Allerne
Sandy Twist.....Jared Reed
Reuben Sloane..Gordon Dilworth
Julio Valveras....Tony Bavaar
Jacob Woodling...Josh Wheeler
Elizabeth Woodling.....
Marijane Maricle
Sarah Woodling...Jan Sherwood
Carmelita..Lorraine Havercroft
Yvonne Sorel..Gemze De Lappe
Suzanne Duval.....Mary Burr
Elsie.....Gisella Svetlik
Rocky.....James Tarbutton
Joe.....Norman Weise
Sam.....Delbert Anderson

New York World-Telegram and The ~~Evening~~ Sun

November 13, 1951

## Restlessness Rules 'Paint Your Wagon'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

It is the restless hope and loneliness and yearning of "Paint Your Wagon" that stay in your mind, rather than the sudden spurts of happiness or accomplishment.

It is a story of men in the gold-rush days, always telling themselves the next chance will pay off. It is more specifically the story of a ghost town. The settlement grows out of nothing, achieves a state of avid joy, then fades off to emptiness and quiet as a new strike takes the men over the horizon into their future.

The locale is almost the only common experience of the characters, beyond their driving, cruel optimism.

**Lake of Gold.**

There is a Mexican, lonely in the Anglo-Saxon camp, who loves a tomboy. She goes off to school and he waits a while then wanders toward a lake of gold in the distance. In the end they meet again, but most of the other people have moved on.

The mood of the play follows the history of such a town, beginning slowly, climbing gradually to a terrific pitch of violence and dissipation, then tapering off to emptiness. The finale is abruptly lifted again with the discovery of the new strike over the next hill.

It is a show of real distinction, courage and novelty, and one people will remember. It has gigantic faults, which make it all the more remarkable that it wields the impression it does.

**Greatest Weakness.**

The greatest weakness lies in its reproducing emotions literally instead of depicting them theatrically.

A case in point is the expansive first act, relating the lonely, restless life of the miners. It is an intermittently interesting, unfunny, almost actionless, hour and a half before any real agitation or energy captures the stage.

Similarly in a brilliant, exciting dance sequence when the central figure is supposed to fling herself about to exhaustion, she really does.

**Polish of Genius.**

James Barton, as star, plays the leader of the town. Mr. Barton knows how to do everything in the theater expertly, and does it, including a song or two, a dance or two, and his immortal drunk act. This style has polish to the point of being theatrical genius, and adamantly dissociates itself from other performers.

Olga San Juan is a hoyden of capable, positive manner suiting a pioneer. She sings with vim and acts with neat directness.

Opposite her is Tony Bavaar as the Mexican boy, playing gently and winningly, and revealing one of the pleasantest voices to hit our musical theater in years.

A mite called Gemze de Lappe has some exquisite moments in her dances with James Mitchell, and Mary Burr lends wit and infinite energy to the big cancan.

The show is often startlingly lovely to look at, with Motley's rich colors against the sun-washed shades of Oliver Smith's sets. Of the tunes, "Elisa" will surely be heard from, and "In Between" is Barton's "September Song," but my bet is "Talk to the Trees" for hit parades.

## New York Post

November 13, 1951

### By Richard Watts Jr.

## Sex Life of the Miners, With Song

In "Paint Your Wagon," which opened tumultuously at the Shubert Theater last night, Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe, authors of the memorable "Brigadoon," have written a vigorous, colorful and melodious musical play about the California gold miners of the '49 days. Agnes de Mille has staged some interesting dances for it, there are a number of excellent songs, and a great deal of pictorial vividness has gone into the production. There are a number of times when the show blazes forth with admirable vitality. I cannot help thinking, though, that, in general, there is something just a little flat about it.

In great part, I suppose the weakness of an agreeably picturesque play with tuneful music is due to book trouble. The brilliant present-day crop of American musical-comedy writers, among whom Mr. Lerner, the librettist, holds high rank, have accustomed us to a lofty standard in the narratives of their work. And "Paint Your Wagon" makes a particular attempt to see to it that its story is something more than a time-lag between songs. Yet Mr. Lerner's tale of the joys and sorrows of a California boom town, with its miners, prostitutes and ingenues, seldom manages to be very interesting.

**Frustrated Miners**

It is hardly a secret kept from us by historians that the early gentlemen of the gold rush had their sex frustrations, which were eventually disposed of by the arrival of a considerable number of enterprising young women. So Mr. Lerner has hit upon this temporary celibacy as the background of his narrative, with the boys at first very restive under the absence of girls, but later given to much gay dancing when the ladies have arrived by stagecoach. Meanwhile, there is an interrupted romance between a dashing young Mexican and the daughter of the leading citizen. It doesn't engender much excitement.

As I have said, things are much better when the show goes into its songs and dances. Whatever Mr. Lerner's problems may be as a librettist, he is in good form as a lyric writer, and, with Mr. Loewe providing some extremely agreeable airs, the music of "Paint Your Wagon" is bright and charming. I particularly liked a number called "I Talk to the Trees" and another known as "I'm On My Way" and a third entitled "How Can I Wait?" The male chorus, replete with beards, and the show girls, who appear as the ladies of the town, sing with the proper gusto, and, fortunately, there are quite a lot of songs.

**Dances and Comedy**

Miss de Mille, who hasn't lost her cunning and ingenuity in these matters, has devised several dance numbers for the denizens of the town saloon that are filled with gusto and vividness, and they enliven the evening considerably. Oliver Smith's sets and the costumes by Motley are also of enormous help to the proceedings. The comedy, on the other hand, is of very little help, even though the veteran James Barton plays the town's first citizen with racy humor. He isn't, however, able to remove the impression that the new show, for all its preoccupation with the guys and dolls of '49, isn't given to excessive hilarity.

The playing is what I think might be described as serviceable. That is, the performers are competent and agreeable, but not particularly exciting. Mr. Barton has most to do, and he is aided by Olga San Juan, who is gay as the daughter, and Tony Bavaar, who sings pleasantly as the romantic Mexican. James Mitchell, Mary Burr and a girl billed on the program as Gemze de Lapp are the most successfully active of the dancers. "Paint Your Wagon" is so lavish with its songs, dances and colorful atmosphere that I feel more than customarily ungrateful when I say the result is mildly disappointing.

---

## DAILY NEWS

November 13, 1951

# 'Paint Your Wagon' a Gay, Breezy Hit With a Hatful of Good Songs

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe, the men who gave us "Brigadoon," have written another engaging musical with a whole hatful of good songs. It is a mining-camp Western titled "Paint Your Wagon," and Cheryl Crawford has given it a bright and lively production at the Shubert Theatre. Being a natural-born desert rat myself, I felt right at home in designer Oliver Smith's frontier shacks and shanties, and was altogether happy in the company of friendly performers like James Barton, Olga San Juan and Tony Bavaar.

It doesn't always happen that one musical has both songs and a book—unless Rodgers and Hammerstein have adapted another novel or play. Frequently a show can slide by very nicely without any tunes, lyrics, plot or characters. "Paint Your Wagon" is a spendthrift job, possessing all the elements of a music-show, including some grand dances directed by Agnes de Mille.

**All Kinds of Songs.**

Jim Barton is perfectly cast as a well-weathered gold hunter who makes a strike in northern California in 1853 and thereby founds a town—a town with a population of several hundred, all but one male. The lone filly is Barton's daughter, Miss San Juan, a very able and attractive lass from Hollywood. She falls in love with Mr. Bavaar, another newcomer who has arrived on Broadway by way of television. It's a good match, in which we can all rejoice.

Loewe, the composer, and Lerner, the lyrist, have packed their show with happy and bouncing songs, and have not forgotten a good selection of sentimental ballads. The numbers range from such rousing chorus numbers as "Whoop-Ti-Ay" and "Hand Me Down that Can o' Beans" to the delightful melodious "Carino Mio" and "Wand'rin' Star." Two other favorites of mine are "They Call the Wind Maria" and "Another Autumn."

**The Old Barton.**

It is fine to have Barton back in the musical again, doing a bit of soft-shoe work and singing in the old Barton way—a way which can't be duplicated. It's not exactly singing and it isn't talking, either—just the Barton of the old Palace and the Shubert musicals. And, by now, everybody knows he is an actor. His performance of the easy-going, tobacco-chewing prospector who founds a ghost town is splendid.

"Paint Your Wagon" has all the clear, invigorating atmosphere of the gold country. The men, be they singers or dancers or both, are a rugged-looking lot in their full beards and haphazard clothing. They are girl-hungry, of course, so when Mr. Barton's town gets really established some honky-tonk ladies move in. They are a fetching and amusing lot, and Miss de Mille has given them and their whiskery pals some grand dances. Notable among individual dancers are James Mitchell, Gemze de Lappe, Mary Burr and James Tarbutton. I must also mention Marijane Maricle, a spare wife whom Barton buys from a Mormon, who has a very funny drunk scene with her new master.

Maybe I'll be seeing you one of these nights at the Shubert, for I'm going back for more of "Paint Your Wagon." It's full of good stuff.

# "Paint Your Wagon"—*continued*

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
November 13, 1951

By WALTER F. KERR

***Uphill Ride***

Halfway through the evening at the Shubert, James Barton eases into a little of the old soft shoe, and it is a bright and shining moment. Twice in the first act Agnes de Mille catches hold of a striking mood—once when a bunch of bearded forty-niners pace the earth and think of the women they haven't got, and again when the women arrive. At the opening of the second act Miss de Mille cuts loose with a roaring dance-hall fandango, and she follows it almost immediately with an exquisitely touching number called "Another Autumn."

But the rest of "Paint Your Wagon" is much too earnest a proposition. Authors Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe, aided and abetted by director Daniel Mann, have been determined that their musical account of the California gold rush shall be down to earth, realistic, honest. They have eschewed the caricature of routine musical comedy, and they have avoided, almost entirely, the interpolation of random vaudeville But in their passion for being straightforward, they have forgotten to put in the fun.

Writing an 'integrated' musical comedy — where the people are believable and the songs are logically introduced—is no excuse for not being funny from time to time. "South Pacific" is funny. But the librettist of "Paint Your Wagon" seems more interested in the authenticity of his background than in the joy of his audience. When he does try to be funny, the humor is half-hearted, or, what is worse, labored. Someone in a dance-hall shouts that he is destitute. One of the girls on the second floor appears instantly, asking who called her. This may be the biggest reach of the evening, so far as the gags go; but there are not many better.

• • •

The "musical play" that isn't funny had better be moving. The tipoff on "Paint Your Wagon" is the fact that the most emotionally rewarding moments of the evening come from the dancers. When Gemze de Lappe and James Mitchell are bandying passion about the stage in a Rope Dance, or when Miss de Lappe is miming her frightened surrender, there is a stir in the theater and warmth on the stage.

But when Olga San Juan and Tony Bavaar pursue a rather tenuous and deflated romance which takes up the body of the book, affairs are much less interesting and though James Barton brings occasional tenderness and some hearty roistering to the scenes detailing his purchase of a bride from a Mormon who has a 'spare,' he is more rollicking personally than given much to rollick with.

Actually, Miss San Juan is a pert and pretty, glowing girl. She lights into a song with abandon, and she makes you want to help her push the evening along. If she sometimes brings too much intensity to a simple number, screwing up her eyes and slugging away with her fists, that may be due to director Mann's apparent conviction that the authors have turned out a powerhouse of a show — strong, meaty, virile.

• • •

Things are pretty virile whenever the male chorus gets to shouting some swaggering gold-rush tunes composer Loewe has provided for them—"I'm on My Way," "Whoop-Ti-Ay!" and "There's a Coach Comin' In." And there are a couple of attractive ballads, "I Still See Elisa" — which James Barton whispers fetchingly—and "Another Autumn."

The lyrics, though, are like the book — direct statements without much embellishment in the way of wit or sentiment. They keep sounding like the cues which introduced them, plausible and matter-of-fact.

The company of "Paint Your Wagon" works hard and well. John Randolph and Robert Penn look wonderfully like posters of the period, and Penn makes a nice thing of a recurring melody painting the charms of Rumson, California. Mary Burr dances a ferocious can-can, and I shall be surprised if the lovely Miss de Lappe doesn't single-handedly revive the institution of the stage-door Johnny.

"Paint Your Wagon" is filled with talented people, but a lot of the time they have to get out and push.

---

Journal American
November 13, 1951

# James Barton Does Everything Very Well

By ROBERT GARLAND

As did this Spring's "Flahooley," although not so definitely, this Fall's "Paint Your Wagon" suffers from last act trouble. Cheryl Crawford, producer of them both, is bothered that way. Things go on right royally until something happens. In the musical play at the Shubert, it is too much of the same thing, good as that thing may sound.

**Alan Jay Lerner wrote the book as well as the lyrics of "Paint Your Wagon." Frederick Loewe wrote the score. It is a lush and lusty score, more lush and lusty than the book and lyrics. But scarcely less monotonous. The last act might be the first act done over. It is not, of course. But it sounds as if it might be.**

In costumes designed by Motley, against backgrounds designed by Oliver Smith, Mr. Loewe's music and Mr. Lerner's words are fullsomely projected by a large and able cast. And the large and able cast is aided by Agnes de Mille's large and able dancers. They work, these dancers, until they nearly drop.

**Yet, with all its general worthiness, "Paint Your Wagon" remains quite a bit repetitious. It once again proves that you can get enough of the same good thing. You can get too much, really.**

• • •

This time the concoctors of "Brigadoon" are concerned with the gold rush of 1853 in America. You meet them on a hilltop in Northern California. You follow them to Salem's store in Rumson. And to Ben Rumson's cabin, where is Jennifer, Ben Rumson's daughter. She, though young, is the only girl for miles around. The facts of life are unknown to her.

**With nothing nasty on her mind, she meets Julio Valveras. He wears his shirt wide open and is quite a singer. So, with nothing else to do, Jennifer takes in his washing. Julio and she grow fond of one another. Especially as Jennifer's father, Ben Rumson, gets drunk and married.**

By the last act, the lovers have gone away and the town of Rumson, named for Ben, has withered. But the young people come back and half-a-dozen of the old people have stayed. So the boy and girl are united. And, I am almost sure, married while the gold-rushers stand about, singing. They aways have their singing to fall back upon.

**It is good and lusty singing, too, as I have said. And beautifully projected. But it does grow repetitious. There is not enough variety or plot to interrupt it. Or to really paint its wagon.**

• • •

James Barton heads the large and able cast. Mr. Barton is a joy while on the stage. He can do everything. And does! He walks. He talks. He gets drunk. He gets married. He even sings. And delightfully. He is Ben Rumson to the hilt. Olga San Juan is Jennifer, his daughter. She is worthy of him. And sings like a moving-picture.

**Tony Bavaar, as Julio Valveras, is a gift from television. And a welcome one. He sings wholeheartedly. And very well. James Mitchell, as the Pete Billings who dances, repeats his success of former years. Under Miss de Mille's direction, he dances like a gold-rushing dervish. There are some active girls to keep him company.**

In fact, there is too much dancing, just as there is too much of everything but story and James Barton. Mr. Barton strolls through the musical play with freedom all his own Daniel Mann, who has, as they say, directed, lets him have his way. It is tactful that he should. Bits of this, of that and of the other thing make, with "Paint Your Wagon," a not unimpressive whole.

**In the March of 1947, "Brigadoon" never unwound itself at the Ziegfeld. In the November of 1951, the same authors' "Paint Your Wagon" never winds itself at the Shubert. That is where the trouble largely lies.**

The New York Times
November 13, 1951

## AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

By mixing Western gold dust with show vitality, the authors of "Paint Your Wagon" have produced a bountiful and exultant musical jamboree, which opened at the Shubert last evening. They are Alan Jay Lerner, the man of letters, and Frederick Loewe, the man of the musical scale, who wrote a memorable legend called "Brigadoon" not so long ago.

From the technical point of view, "Paint Your Wagon" may not be up to that artistic standard. For it is not quite so meticulously edited and organized. But no complaints on that score are rumbling out of this corner this morning. For the abundance, good humor and romantic beauty of "Paint Your Wagon" make a very happy evening in the theatre.

* * *

Mr. Lerner and Mr. Loewe have latched on to a yarn about the gold rush in 1853. In the simplest terms, "Paint Your Wagon" is concerned with the fact that there are too many men and not enough women in the mining camps. On the spur of the moment it is a little hard to explain how this situation results in some lusty ballads, some scorching ballets, James Barton's illustrious drunk routine and Olga San Juan's cameo loveliness and sprite-like singing.

But those are the most notable of the gold strikes in the course of a rich evening, and somehow they belong. As a roisterous mining-town boss, Mr. Barton's warmth and garishness are especially heartening. He can make anything seem honest and lovable. And Miss San Juan, as a miner's illiterate daughter, is the freshest item that has turned up on the musical stage this season.

They are well-matched by some of the most raucous and hirsute singing desperadoes in Eastern North America. Mr. Loewe has written roaring tunes for them, composed and sung fortissimo. He also has written some glowing romantic songs that Tony Bavaar has completely mastered. Mr. Bavaar has a voice and a style that are gifted and exciting.

As usual, Agnes de Mille has composed the ballets with plenty of gaiety. They range from rowdy bar-room festivity to the exquisite numbers danced by Gemze de Lappe and James Mitchell; and, as a matter of fact, there is more dancing in the middle of the show than you actually need. "Paint Your Wagon" has taken the philosophy of abundance a little too literally.

* * *

But the tone of the material and of the performance is so convivial that no one is going to complain very severely about the excess of riches. Motley's extravagant costumes are entertaining, and some of them are also entrancing. Oliver Smith's broad and breezy settings are delightful. Standing in the director's anxious box, Daniel Mann has staged the show with pace, inventiveness and relish.

It's a lot of fun. Everyone associated with the town's newest musical carnival is in good health and humor and has conspired in giving the audience a royal good time.

**New York Theatre Critics' Reviews**

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# "Dinosaur Wharf"

## New York Post

November 9, 1951

### By Richard Watts Jr.

## Violence Along the Waterfront

"Dinosaur Wharf" is that most disturbing of all theatrical phenomena, the ambitious play that is almost good. This new drama by Joel Wyman, which opened at the National last night, is a thing of fits and starts, in which excellent scenes are followed by scenes that get nowhere, and then, just as you are about to give up, there is cause for hope once more. In the end, it can only be reported that, for all its moments of effectiveness, it fails to work out, and that Mr. Wyman, while he is a dramatist of promise, remains an unfulfilled one.

Dealing with the timely subject of racketeering and violence among the New York longshoremen, "Dinosaur Wharf" has the topical value of urgency, and, when Mr. Wyman uses melodramatic materials, no one can accuse him of exaggerating. Furthermore, his play comes close at times to achieving that important quality of having significance on more than one level. At its best, the new drama not only contemplates the contemporary terror of the waterfront, but has implications that extend to an entire world, in which violence begets violence and leads to mutual destruction.

**Use of Force**

The author is telling the story of a sensitive girl, who hates violence, but finds that to employ force, the longshoreman sees its futility.

Mr. Wyman has written his drama with complete sincerity, with flashes of power, and with a sense of both the irony and the tragedy of his subject. But he is far from an expert playwright. His narrative is both halting and abrupt. Mixed in with its good points are scenes that are hopelessly clumsy and others that seem to stand still. There is little really sustained interest in "Dinosaur Wharf." It makes its points in individual episodes, and they can be excellent, but there are too many interrupting occasions where Mr. Wyman is ineffectual.

He also has trouble with his characterizations. By far the ablest of his creations is the racketeer, a ruthless and ambitious young man who has learned glib, fraudulent justifications for his conduct. The girl, on the other hand, is so vaguely written that it is difficult to learn how much of her hatred of violence is based on a philosophical viewpoint and how much arises from weakness. Unfortunately, too, the other important roles, the girl's ex-seagoing father, the garrulous old fellow who dies a hero, and the longshoreman, are thinly set down.

The acting, however, is excellent, particularly in two cases. Lois Wheeler, one of the best of the younger American actresses, brings an intelligence and sensitivity to her role of the daughter that atone for much of the inexpertness of the part and make one regret that Miss Wheeler isn't seen more frequently in the local theater. And James Gregory plays the gangster with force and a true sense of character. Leo Penn and Harrison Dowd do as well as could be expected as the longshoreman and the father. It is too bad that the play doesn't work out better.

**"DINOSAUR WHARF"**

Play by Joel Wyman; setting by Samuel Leve; staged and presented by Terese Hayden at the National Theatre, November 8, 1951. The cast:

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|---|---|
| Timmy | William Darrid |
| Thug | Richard Castle |
| Charlie | James Gregory |
| Pop | Harrison Dowd |
| Sam | John Marriott |
| Mike | Thomas Russino |
| John | Stuart McIntosh |
| Paula | Lois Wheeler |
| Clancy | Barnard Hughes |
| Woman | Sally Gracie |
| Boy | Salvatore Mineo |
| Will | Leo Penn |
| Chris | Richard Venture |
| Mr. Brodie | John Marley |
| Mr. Sherman | Gregory Robbins |

Synopsis: The scene is a barge, moored at an abandoned wharf, in the East River. The time is late September. The action is in five scenes.

## DAILY NEWS

November 9, 1951

# 'Dinosaur Wharf' Is a Taut, Timely Drama of New York's Riverfront

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The play which opened at the National Theatre last evening has the mystical and rather pointless title of "Dinosaur Wharf," but there is nothing mystical or pointless about the work itself. It is a taut, tough and timely melodrama about dirty life on the New York waterfront, and it reveals the author, Joel Wyman, as a newcomer who is an upcomer. Mr. Wyman writes with guts, and this, his first play, establishes him as a dramatist with a splendid sense of theatre. His lapses are few, unimportant and pardonable in view of his ability to see, hear and write clearly.

Another thing that makes "Dinosaur Wharf" newsworthy is that it brings to Broadway a new producer-director, Terese Hayden, who tried out Mr. Wyman's drama last Summer when she was resident director of the Ivy Tower Playhouse at Spring Lake, N. J. Miss Hayden's staging of the play is admirable, and so is the cast she has chosen.

**On Top of the News.**

"Dinosaur Wharf" might have been written last week instead of months ago. It tells of gangsterism in New York's harbor and of the plight of longshoremen working under mob rule and the shape-up system. Its action, in five crisp scenes, occurs aboard a barge and on the abandoned East River wharf above it.

**Clear and Compact.**

The barge is lived on by a crippled old sailor and his daughter. In picturing the daughter Mr. Wyman may have stretched probability somewhat in making her a sensitive and attractive lass who works in a bookstore and paints good pictures in any medium. But the girl becomes intensely real as Lois Wheeler plays her—a young woman who wants desperately to escape from the waterfront and its pitiless life. She wants, too, to remove from this life a young man—and here is a fine performance by Leo Penn—who has become a leader among longshoremen who are stirring in revolt against their underworld rulers.

There are many characters in the drama, and each has been drawn clearly and compactly by both author and actors. James Gregory is just right as a hard and cocksure river rat. Harrison Dowd gives an excellent character performance as the girl's father, and Tom Russino, making his Broadway debut, has a vivid scene in the role of a slow-witted, big-hearted dock worker.

The play builds quietly and certainly to some brutal action, and the impact of its ending does not let it down. Samuel Leve's setting of the wharf and the barge is a pictorial delight—and, what is more important, an integral part of the proceedings at the National. These proceedings are exciting, for they show that the theatre still can find new writers, new directors and new players.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

November 9, 1951

# 'Dinosaur Wharf' At the National

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

What you have been reading in the daily papers about dock strikes is much higher class drama than what is being acted about them at the National under the title "Dinosaur Wharf."

In stock company manner, this is an overacted, underdirected performance of a highly confused melodrama. Somewhere enmeshed in its rhetoric and physical conflicts is a fleeting idea about the harm a racket can do to a tricky labor situation. But it arrives at no resolution of point of view or argument.

This is a story of a young longshoreman who wants his union to vote for a hiring hall, which will do away with the arbitrary selection of men for jobs called the "shape-up."

**Squares Things?**

The play is no more imaginative than to have its entire plot hang on the villain's listening at a door while the heroine gives away her lover's secret. She has turned on her father, as a no-good bum. To clear accounts, the father dresses up in her lover's cap and coat and walks deliberately into an ambush meant for the young man.

What this solves is hard to say. How it solves it, is harder to describe.

At one point in the story, the girl insists to her father that her mother left him because "someone came along whose guts rang true." For a statement of physiological attraction, this seems hard to top.

At another point the heroine wails, "My feet are wet; my shame can't dry them."

There are also milder remarks like "If you want to stay human you can't live like an animal," which have their own entertainment value.

Everybody in the play, at one time or another, gets to shouting far too early on the rise of a scene, and has to end up literally screaming in falsetto. Certain sequences are played as if dragged along by the Red Queen shouting "Faster, faster!" Others similarly recall the mood of "Alice in Wonderland," as they pedal down their pace until the listener feels dreamy.

All this happens in an elaborate setting which represents a barge in the foreground with a dock behind it.

**Cut Down—But Not Out.**

Lois Wheeler plays the heroine with such careful daintiness and elegance, I was convinced she had been adopted by the retired seaman she calls father. Leo Penn has the intense swagger for the hero, but his excitement runs yards ahead of his character.

James Gregory has a highly enjoyable time in a three-ply role of villain-Romeo-clown. He also has an unenviable assignment of running twice across the stage, through a door, and up a flight of steps with a knife sticking in his back, placed there by the heroine.

As the father, Harrison Dowd occasionally achieves the only relaxed connection with reality in the cast.

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Journal American

November 9, 1951

# Star of the Show Is Leve's Setting

By ROBERT GARLAND

At the National, "Dinosaur Wharf" is one more incomer from the Summer theatre. Joel Wyman, a new and not unpromising dramatist, is the author. Lois Wheeler, Leo Penn, James Gregory and Harrison Dowd are the featured members of the cast. And Terese Hayden of the Spring Lake Ivy Tower Playhouse, is the presenter.

**Even so, Samuel Leve is the star. His single scene, a barge moored at an abandoned wharf on New York City's East River, is the best of its kind since "Dead End" by Norman Bel Geddes. Nothing, before or since has equalled that masterwork. But Mr. Leve's make-believe waterfront is, as I have hinted, something to admire.**

Against it, the actors act more real than they sound. Including the featured ones. They take on a reality which stems more from what the scene-designer has designed than from what the playwriter has written. I don't know when a scenery man has dominated a play as much as Samuel Leve does "Dinosaur Wharf."

**Maybe, although this is merely guess-work, Joel Wyman's play would seem more solid if Samuel Leve's scenery did not stand up for itself so skillfully.**

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## A Timely Play

Be this as it may, "Dinosaur Wharf" is timely. It deals with New York City's waterfront like today's newspaper. Only, of course, much more personally. Through the plotting and subplotting runs the love story of Paula and Will. They get together on Samuel Leve's barge. But they are not entirely of it.

**Especially our heroine, Paula. She, more than our hero Will, wants to get away from it all. Will, who would rather reform the waterfront, is anxious to hang around and do it. A idealistic boy, he is not one to run away. So, while his girl-friend is packing her belongings, he is pouring oil upon the East River waters.**

Slowly, I fear, surely, I know, "Dinosaur Wharf" runs into melodrama. Into melodrama which is never as melodramatic as the waterfront in the press. And never as genuine either. I guess it is difficult to be as brash on stage as it is on the far East Side. Or as believable. Or as frightening.

**But, not to give away the story, Paula and Will live through the finale. That is the impression I get while Pop lies stretched out and getting cold behind the bamboo curtains of Mr. Leve's finely imagined vessel.**

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## Leve Is the Star

Some of the West 41st Street players go back to the Ivy Tower Playhouse. One of these is Lois Wheeler, who plays Paula. She plays her earnestly, which is to say she plays her like a member of Actor's Studio. Leo Penn does the same as Will. But they do not overcome the real waterfront. Or Samuel Leve's scenery.

**As Pop, Harrison Dowd is ahead of either. He stomps around Mr. Leve's barge as if he had always lived and died there. He is a theatre man from 'way back, as his new novel, "The Night Air," proves. At the National, his characterization is a joy. I, like you, am sorry when he dies for last act sympathy.**

As Charlie, James Gregory is rightly in the pictures. And the East River water-sounds are creditable as well as considerate of the players. They rise and fall with the urgency of the moments. The direction of Miss Hayden, who also is the presenter, is Spring Lake transferred to Broadway. And to Mr. Leve's scenic barge.

**If New York City's waterfront were not so dramatic, so melodramatic, Joel Wyman's "Dinosaur Wharf" might seem more so. Anyway, Samuel Leve is its star. His barge of barges is the town's most atmospheric background.**